DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 165 207 CS 502 362

AUTHOR Hensley, Carl Wayne
TITLE The Death of a Rhetorical Vision: Disciples of Christ and Social Change.
PUB DATE Nov 78
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (64th, Minneapolis, Minnesota, November 2-5, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Christianity; *Cultural Context; Culture; *Organizational Change; Religion; Religious Conflict; *Religious Cultural Groups; *Rhetoric; *Social Change
IDENTIFIERS *Disciples of Christ

ABSTRACT

The Disciples of Christ, an indigenous American religious movement born on the frontier, grew rapidly until early in the twentieth century. Its growth was based on a rhetorical vision that offered a plausible interpretation of the data of the senses and accounted for developments in human activity and conditions. That rhetorical vision was linked to democratic political fantasies of the worth of the individual and of rural-agrarian supremacy. It decayed from a dynamic drama of restoration of the pristine New Testament church to a rigid structure of institutionalization. Faith and imagination go together, translating spiritual truths into the fantasy world view of the culture, and while ultimate truths remain constant, the rhetorical approach must change. Liberal and conservative Disciples lost sight of this principle and lost most of the persuasiveness enjoyed in the early days. When the vision fragmented in the conflict with cultural change and the new European theology, most of its millennial eschatology faded out. A religious rhetoric that neglects the eschatological frame of reference is not true to the biblical message nor to the needs of modern people. (TJ)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED165207

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE DEATH OF A RHETORICAL VISION:

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Carl Wayne Hensley
Professor of Speech-Communication
Bethel College
St. Paul, MN

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Carl Wayne Hensley
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

A paper presented to the Speech Communication Association, Annual Convention, Minneapolis, MN, November 3, 1978

CS502362

THE DEATH OF A RHETORICAL VISION:

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The Disciples of Christ is an indigenous American religious movement born on the frontier in the midst of early nineteenth century revivalism. Coming into existence during the first decade of that century, partially as a rationalistic reaction to evangelical emotionalism, the Disciples grew steadily until the movement numbered well over one million by 1900.[1] Beginning in Jeffersonian America, and surging forward in the Jacksonian era, Disciples prospered in an environment of individualistic, self-reliant, optimistic, and aggressive pioneers. Among people seeking to build a new and glorious society, Disciples thrived on "the firm conviction that an earthly utopia was a real possibility and that men could free themselves from the tyranny of the old order."[2] Moreover, Disciples formulated and vigorously promulgated a unique rhetorical vision which met "the needs and demands of Americans reveling in [their] new freedom."[3]

The cultural key to understanding the persuasive power of the rhetorical vision of the Disciples of Christ is the cluster of fantasy themes relating to millennialism--the belief that the kingdom of God was soon to be established in America.[4] The Disciples dramatized numerous postmillennial fantasy themes which combined to form a complete and coherent rhetorical vision with which they persuaded numerous people to join them as protagonists in the drama culminating in the millennium. Led by men like Barton W. Stone in Kentucky and the father-son team of Thomas and Alexander

Campbell in Pennsylvania, Disciples energetically spread their message of an optimistic, culture-transforming, kingdom-building Christianity across the western frontier of the young nation.

Disciples found the authority for their vision in their understanding of the biblical account of creation, corruption, conflict, and conquest. The ultimate goal, the millennium, would result when the dramatic struggle between God and his followers and Satan and his followers was resolved with Satan's defeat and the restoration of the Edenic paradise lost as a result of sin in the early chapters of Genesis. Along with many Americans Disciples regarded the United States as the chosen land for the ultimate inauguration of the millennium. Various rhetorical visions in the nineteenth century depicted America as God's garden of fulfillment, and many western Americans fervently believed that the frontier was to be the center of God's work to restore Eden--the center of Christ's millennial empire. Henry Nash Smith develops the emphasis that this was "the myth of mid-nineteenth America,"[5] and David Edwin Harrell, Jr. has demonstrated that this myth "became deeply enmeshed in the theology of . . . the Disciples of Christ."[6] Moreover, God's protagonists were American, Anglo-Saxon Protestants, especially Disciples. The inaugural plan was three-fold: (1) the chosen people would restore the pristine purity of the church revealed in the New Testament; (2) the purified church would be a united church; (3) the united church would march forth evangelistically to conquer the world for Christ. Then, the millennium would be ushered in, and the millennium was most frequently defined as "a thousand years of triumphant Christianity."[7] Jews, Turks, Deists, and pagans would be converted, and all plagues of mankind would cease such as crime, war, disease, civil discord, dishonesty, tyranny, bigotry, and oppression. Through his

faithful followers Christ would rule the world in the political as well as religious order for a thousand years. The drama would climax with Christ's personal second coming to finalize the eternal restoration of the lost paradise. Since they were the central characters in the drama whose efforts would directly result in the golden age, Disciples had within their rhetorical vision the hope, zeal, and impelling motivation to attract people to enlist in the cause and labor unceasingly. After all, "their enterprise was nothing else than a providential chapter in the plan of the ages."[8]

Beginning with the biblical basis, Disciples incorporated into their rhetorical vision key elements from cultural dramas which celebrated the spirit of American democracy. Such commitments as individual freedom, rural-agrarian supremacy, worth of the individual, and human equality were integral facets of the Disciples' vision. Building on this common ground, they related their religious dramatic themes to the listeners' secular dreams and then transferred the listeners' initial acceptance to the total vision. Disciples skillfully blended secular dreams into their religious vision and dramatically demonstrated how those secular dreams could find complete fulfillment in the religious.[9] Energetic, independent Westerners, desiring to build new frontiers in all areas of life regardless of political, economic, or religious consequences, responded enthusiastically. The vision appealed to their disregard for established precedents and to their desire to set new precedents. It appealed to them as free-born children of the new political Republic to experience an equally new birth of religious freedom by rising up in battle to cast off chains of religious slavery (as they had cast off chains of political slavery) and no longer be slaves of the pope or conscripts of Protestant sectarianism.[10] Many Americans responded to the challenge, and Disciples grew in size and influence.

The millennial rhetorical vision remained constant throughout the first generation, and as the transition to second generation leadership took place during the years 1866-1880, the new leaders firmly retained every phase of the rhetorical vision. However, cultural transitions were taking place which would drastically affect the vision and its influence. As the transitions took place, the Disciples' vision failed to adapt and ultimately died before the end of the second generation.

During the years 1865-1900 the urban population of America doubled, and "big city problems" emerged. Foreign immigration increased dramatically with most of the immigrants settling in Eastern cities and with increasing numbers of them coming from southern and eastern Europe. Moreover, "native Americans . . . left the rural areas, especially the Middle West, to augment the city's fast growing population."[11] As the rural to urban transition continued, Americans "were forced to realize that they were no longer living in an agrarian democracy, but in an industrial nation. . . ."[12] Immigration, urbanization, and industrialization combined to triumph "over the agricultural economy that remained from the nation's youth."[13] With the rise of this new social order came new social problems, new tensions, and new challenges to various religious rhetorical visions. These problems, tensions and challenges arose from the resultant "depression, doubt and struggle" of the period.[14] The financial depression of 1873, railroad strikes and riots in 1877 and 1886, and labor tensions, more depression, and agricultural panic during the 1890's constituted situations which churches found impossible to ignore but extremely difficult to explain. Religious fantasies of optimism and progress clashed head-on with the realities of mobs rioting, freight cars burning, and bombs blasting. Heirs of "the self-reliant tradition of agrarian America, were suddenly finding themselves at the mercy of distant

corporation executives."[15] With this intense transition and tension "it became increasingly difficult to believe in the automatic, benevolent operation of Divine cosmic laws."[16]

During this period evangelical rhetorical visions were facing another challenge in the fantasy themes of the new science and the new theology. Darwin developed his concept of evolution and set it forth to challenge traditional Christian anthropology. Along with adjustment to Darwin's scientific drama came the challenge of European liberal theology to traditional Protestant theology. The accommodation of Darwinian science and liberal theology led to new rhetorical visions for numerous Protestants, which included the fantasies of "the immanence of God, the organic solidaristic view of society, and the presence of the kingdom of heaven on earth," and this resulted in a strong stress on "ethical Christianity" and a view of Christianity as a natural religion.[17] Out of this challenge grew the Social Gospel vision which sought to solve the problems of mankind in the urban setting by replacing the traditional fantasy of individualistic salvation with the fantasy of the redemption of the social order. In response to the challenges of industrialism, urbanism, and the new science and theology, "the mood of [many] Protestant evangelicals changed . . . from one of cocky optimism to chastened uncertainty."[18] Among other evangelicals these challenges were not as direct and the response was less dramatic because they "were cut off by their rural constituencies from the first shocks of large-scale industrial crisis."[19] Disciples were among this latter group.

This period of cultural transition was also the period of greatest growth for Disciples. The movement increased from about 400,000 members in the 1870s to 1,120,000 in 1900, the growth occurring primarily in rural

and small town America.[20] Having begun on the frontier of 1800-1809, they had little influence or expansion in eastern U.S. They gained strength in some midwestern cities, such as Cincinnati, Louisville, Indianapolis, St. Louis, and Kansas City, but basically were not able "to overcome their initial aversion to cities."[21] When the government census announced the end of the frontier in 1890, Disciples were "only 6 2/3 percent urban."[22] By 1906, when Disciples numbered more than 1,250,000 adherents, about 89% were rural residents.[23]

The crisis generated in urban America eventually affected rural America, and a tide of discontent swept over rural citizens, "exemplified with the rise of a political party known as the Populists."[24] This party caused a "great agrarian revolt that was to last for a quarter of a century."[25] The Populist revolt fostered a vision which resembled the vision of Jacksonian Democrats--one which dramatized revolt against eastern wealth and domination by eastern plutocrats.[26] As a wealth of eastern capitalists seemed to increase, rural Americans seemed to become poorer. Populists contended that government should "restrain the selfish tendencies of those who profited at the expense of the poor and needy; [and] that the people, not the plutocrats, must control the government."[27] They believed that the common people had the ability to frame and enforce any measures necessary to deliver themselves from oppression. The Disciples' rhetorical dramas of egalitarianism, freedom of individuals, etc., developed in the midst of Jacksonianism, were at home in this setting. As William Jennings Bryan spoke to the silver-gold controversy in 1896, he fantasized about the common man, the "broader class of business man," the one who worked for wages, the country lawyer, cross-roads merchant, and farmer.[28] Among these groups Disciples were strongest. The Disciples' millennial

garden fantasy echoed in Bryon's characterization of "the hardy pioneers who have braved all the dangers of the wilderness, who have made the desert to blossom as the rose. . . ."[29] Disciples would have shouted a strong "Amen" to Bryan's dramatization that "the great cities rest upon our broad and fertile prairies. Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again . . . but destroy our farms, and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country."[30] Among Bryan's constituents Disciples of the second generation continued to set forth various fantasies of their rhetorical vision with success.[31]

During the second generation Disciples also began taking the shape of other mid-nineteenth century Protestant evangelicals. They solidified a body of doctrine which they used to insulate their movement "against the corrosive forces of the new science and of social unrest by . . . a preoccupation with the salvation and perfection of the individual. . . ."[32] Their fantasies focused on individual redemption and traditional sanctions, while "leaving social consequences to take care of themselves."[33] Retaining almost a completely theological orientation, Disciples tended to dramatize doctrinal loyalty, leaving social emphases in the realm of opinion. Individual Christians were free to hold opinions on social issues and act according to a personal social ethic, but the collective church was restricted. Disciples continued to dramatize fantasies of the original rhetorical vision, such as the restoration of the New Testament pattern of the church, the agrarian myth, and individual salvation, as well as a theology that sin explains social evils, making individual conversion from sin the remedy for social ills. Had the Disciples made the urban shift early in the second generation, they might have been on the leading edge of the Social Gospel movement. H. Richard Niebuhr has pointed out that the

Disciples' millennial vision contained two elements which became manifest in the Social Gospel: "on the one hand attention is directed to the attainment of happiness in a mundane social order; upon the other hand the call is for an active or 'muscular' Christianity."[34]

However, Disciples did not make the urban shift and consequently did not have a strong social emphasis. Although the rural facet of the millennial vision became a less accurate description of an urban-industrial society, Harrell demonstrates that "the idyllic agrarian myth persisted long after its basis in fact had vanished."[35] This allowed Disciples to continue to promulgate various millennial dramas into the twentieth century with moderate success. Nonetheless, their vision was "being subjected to serious pressures."[36] Some saw the inadequacy of the vision and began to dramatize the need for urban involvement:

> There is a giant in the land whose name is Labor. Long, Samson-like, he has been willing to toil and sweat for others; now he is beginning to ask questions. "I dig and build railroads; why am I compelled to walk?" . . . "I build mansions; why must my little family live in a hovel?" "I build schoolhouses; why must my children leave school so young in life?" . . . Is the church leading toward the emancipation of the laboring man? Does the church help him better his condition? Nay, the church is not holding the highest position as leader of the best agencies to secure the good of the bodies and souls of men.[37]

A few isolated voices picked up this fantasy and attempted to chain it out into a new vision which advocated evangelizing the cities.[38] Had the scene of the drama shifted to fit new social realities and an urban fantasy chained out, Disciples may well have made the rural-urban transition and exerted as significant a religious influence on twentieth century urban America as they did on nineteenth century rural America. However, the general view, even of some who called for evangelism in the cities, was that cities were inherently evil and a threat to pure religion. So, the

majority response to the urban challenge was that "the devoted agrarians . . . simply refused the challenge."[39] They did not believe that true religion had a future in the cities and consigned cities to the devil's domain. Disregarding the needs of the cities, they felt that "the great need is more ministers . . . who will be willing to labor and live in our country and village churches."[40] So, the majority of second generation Disciples continued to participate in the traditional rhetorical vision and did not adapt it to people's problems and to the changing conditions in culture during the 1880s and 1890s. Perhaps they failed to make the cultural-social transition because their rhetorical vision did not contain sufficient motivational appeal to impel a shift. The original vision, with its strong agrarian dramatization and abhorrence of cities, lacked motivational appeal to challenge its adherents to carry their vision to urban America and evangelize the cities. Moreover, since the vision had evolved in rural America and militantly glorified the agrarian scene, it failed to contain an appeal to attract the city dweller--even though it probably would appeal to rural Americans uprooted from the country and transplanted in cities. In addition, the vision set forth a strong racist characterization of the chosen people, which would repel rather than attract the large numbers of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants who swelled the urban population of America. Thus, perusal of weekly journals and sermon anthologies of the period reveals a continual espousal of various facets of the original millennial vision as central elements of Disciples rhetoric.[41]

Although many Americans, especially those among whom the Disciples were strongest, ignored the trend of society away from the ideals of their areas, a clash between new fantasy themes and the old rhetorical vision was inevitable. Many Americans had carried into the twentieth century

certain dramas essential to any millennial vision. Among these were "the reality, certainty, and eternity of moral values"[42] and "the inevitability, particularly in America, of progress."[43] By 1920, these dramas were part of a rejected past along with "the collapse of this millennial dream."[44] The millennial agrarian republic "of saintly citizens isolated in the western hemisphere from European corruption" was replaced primarily with the vision of "a new perfection based on industrialism."[45]

As the shift in visions of social reality permeated all of American society, the events surrounding the shift failed to corroborate the Disciples' millennial drama, it became a less acceptable account of social reality, and it gradually lost its effectiveness. At the same time that the social reality of the vision was fading in cultural significance, Disciples' rhetoric was confronted with the challenge of European liberal theology. Liberal theology with its methodology of "higher criticism" gained a foothold among Disciples in the 1890s when the University of Chicago became a conspicuous exponent of that position. A prominent Disciple, Herbert L. Willett, was on the Chicago faculty and was an outspoken advocate of the liberal rhetorical vision. Willett and a group of like-minded Disciples formed an association called the Campbell Institute which with its publication, The Scroll, became a platform for spreading the viewpoints of the higher critics among Disciples. Higher criticism set forth fantasy themes relating to the Bible and to religious authority new and radically different from those traditional to Disciples. Higher criticism challenged the original vision's premise of unquestioned biblical authority based on complete inspiration. In so doing, the critics attacked the millennial dream at its roots. Higher criticism gradually confronted Disciples with a dilemma: either accept its "findings" regarding the credibility, inspiration, and authority of the Bible in the

name of science and modern culture, give up the senseless quest to restore the primitive church, and seek Christian union on a modern basis; or, retreat into a defense of time-honored doctrine, place unity in a secondary role, and staunchly contend for restoration. Thus, the scene was set for the total millennial vision to dissipate. One group of Disciples pursued the path of higher criticism; the other group took the position of defending biblical authority and the validity of restoration. Consequently, the dramatization of a common rhetorical vision gave way to argumentative rhetoric, one side arguing for methods of modern scholarship and the other side arguing for the traditional views of revelation, inspiration, and authority. Each side addressed its arguments more to insiders and less to outsiders, further decreasing the persuasive appeal to potential converts

The growth of the Disciples during the nineteenth century continued into the early part of the twentieth century. The increase in adherents continued until 1914, when Disciples number 1,442,000 members. However, in 1915 the figure decreased by about 300,000; although the growth rate eventually went up again, Disciples never again grew as rapidly as prior to 1915.[46] Various reasons probably could be given for this fact, but my contention is that a significant reason was that, when the original dream faded, it was not replaced by a new, adequate rhetorical vision. Disciples were so busy arguing over the issues of liberal theology and its implications that they ceased to speak in terms of any coherent panoramic drama, and this led to a defensive rhetorical stance. It is probable that argumentative rhetoric does not generally influence the populace as strongly as dramatistic rhetoric, and defensive rhetoric is not as influential as offensive rhetoric. Therefore, one significant reason for the decrease in persuasive effectiveness (and hence growth) was that decay of the coherent rhetorical

vision and the failure to renew it.

Although the vision had withstood early assaults by liberal theology, primarily because it still had substantial credence in its cultural setting, the devastating attacks came as it was losing influence in American culture. Those who constituted the left wing emphasis among Disciples were determined "that the future of the movement be directed along thoroughly philosophical and scientific lines."[47] To follow this approach to biblical study meant that the view of the Bible held by Disciples during the nineteenth Century--that it was "authentic, authoritative and final"--must be surrendered.[48] The gist of the attack on orthodoxy was summed up in a lecture by Willett, as reported in the Christian Standard: "Modern theology does not regard the Bible as a verbally inspired document or as presenting a logically organized body of religious and moral instruction, Dr. Herbert L. Willett of Chicago told an audience at the Linwood Boulevard Christian Church last night."[49] The claim that the Bible is an infallible book does not rest on valid grounds, for the Bible does not claim to be "a supernaturally produced and safeguarded collection of documents. . . ."[50] The Bible was "not written by God, nor even by men who were speaking with supernatural and inerrant knowledge of God's will."[51] Instead, the Bible contains sacred books not unlike the sacred books of other religions in all ages, all of which contain "the passionate search of the soul after God, and the unfailing answer to that search."[52] If the Bible contains the best answers to the search, it is because the Bible speaks most adequately to man's religious consciousness and not because of external authority or authenticity. Scientific study of the Bible may reveal "contradictions, discrepancies, superstitions, and myths," but this does not weaken "the force of the moral ideals and precepts."[53] Higher criticism claimed that

the faith of early Christians "actually engendered, or created, and embellished this history [i.e., the history of the life of Jesus and the primitive church], which was used, of course, to substantiate it."[54] The early Christian community placed words in Jesus' mouth which he did not speak and told of deeds which he did not perform. Among these additions was the emphasis on apocalypticism, including millennial thought. This was part of the "religion about Jesus" and not part of "the religion of Jesus." New scientific methods enabled Bible scholars to discover the religion of Jesus, which was primarily ethical and moral, freed from Jewish eschatology.

This view of biblical revelation and inspiration led to the conclusion that "the Bible, as a whole, is not an ultimate authority to one who thoroughly studies it," and that it is not "an authority to us on all the questions with which it deals."[55] Since the Bible is "the expression of the religious life of a people of an age long gone by,"[56] it cannot constitute "a cozy deposit of absolute truth."[57] Thus, the Bible is not a formal or arbitrary authority for the church and is not a rule of living for individual Christians. No longer can Christians afford to regard it "as a constitution according to which the church is rigidly to conform," but must see it "as a record of the experience of the greatest saints and sages of all times."[58] The authority of the Bible ultimately resides in "the conviction of the individual mind . . . which must determine what for itself shall be the [canonical and authoritative] limits of Holy Scripture."[59]

The liberal vision replaced the Bible as an external, objective authority with a focus on the authority of individual religious consciousness as one's religious authority. From this basic position, liberal rhetoric attacked every facet of the millennial vision in an ardent spirit of "search out and destroy." Restoration of a model church blueprinted in

Scriptures was a foolish quest; the concept of chosen people was a product of pride and ignorance; and Christian unity could be based on willing cooperation among any who desired it. Moreover, the eschatological passages of the Bible so crucial to the original vision were dismissed as part of the primitive cultural setting of the Bible with no permanent significance for contemporary Christian faith.[60]

The primary reaction by conservative Disciples to the liberal threat was to retreat into a citadel of traditional orthodoxy, establish a defensive holding position, and lash out at the attackers. J. W. McGarvey expressed this general position--"When the Bible in its most vital parts, is assailed, no personal considerations shall deter me from defending it and exposing its assailant."[61] So, the coherent vision gave way to a rhetoric which busied itself with repelling attacks which "professed to change Scriptural baptistm . . . destroy the essential inspiration of the Scriptures, or deny the divinity and lordship of Jesus."[62] The central rhetorical strategy became the marshalling of data to use as weapons to win the battle over the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible.

With the Bible still regarded as the divinely inspired revelation of God and the authority for Christians, restoration remained a central fantasy for conservatives. External forms were important because they were commanded and practiced in the New Testament. The church was ordained by Jesus Christ and established by him through his apostles. Therefore, the church must "come under the laws and jurisdictions of the Bible," and "be tried by [biblical] precedents."[63] If a church does not conform to the New Testament pattern and precedent, it has no right to be called a church because "it violates a divine copyright."[64] Disciples were still a peculiar people and could not compromise with denominations.

The rhetoric of the conservatives became defensive, dogmatic, and heavily doctrinal. Conservatives felt constrained to defend traditional views of inspiration, revelation, and authority. They viewed the crux of the controversy as doctrinal. "We would never have faced the present chaotic condition if our brethren had been true to the scheme of redemption revealed in God's word," one of the new, younger leaders asserted in summary in 1928.[65] On the basis of their assumptions regarding the Bible, they preached doctrinal messages and relied most often for proof on biblical quotations, examples, and allusions. Their appeal, therefore, as with their forefathers, continued to be directed toward people who shared their vision of biblical reality, while they freely attacked their liberal foes. Liberals were guilty of eliminating "the supernatural from Christianity and [reducing] it to a system of pure and unadulterated rationalism."[66] One conservative characterized Willett as "the beloved, sweet-toned prophet of modernism."[67] B. L. Chase exemplified the vitriolic flavor of much of the rhetoric in his fantasy attacking the Campbell Institute and its publication, The Scroll.

> I regard this new publication as a very dangerous ally of heresy . . .[and] there is always one thing that can be said against it, that will arouse suspicion in every loyal, God-fearing, Disciples' heart, 'it is published in Chicago! ! !' Can any good thing possibly come out of Chicago? . . . Did not President Harper die there? Is not that the place where Willett lives? Did not God destroy that city once by fire in 1871, as he destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah? Will he not destroy that great and wicked city again by water, as certain prophets are now predicting in the near future? Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. There is nothing that can be done with The Scroll but to await the final judgment.[68]

The clash led to an inevitable division and to two different rhetorical visions. This consequence, coupled with the original vision's diminished importance in American culture, resulted in the death of the

original millennial vision in the life and rhetoric of both groups. Twentieth century Disciples no longer had a coherent, total rhetorical vision with a grand, panoramic drama. The unfolding plot of restoration, unity, evangelization, and ultimately the millennium was hopelessly fragmented. The climactic moment in human history, the millennium, faded from the visions of both factions, and although evangelization (with social emphases for liberals and individual emphases for conservatives) remained part of their visions, the central visions became Christian union for liberals and restoration for conservatives. What remained were two factions with two incomplete visions. While each party accused the other of abandoning the original vision, the fact was that both had lost sight of the original rhetorical vision. Both attempted to set forth dramas without a last act. The overarching vision died, and no comprehensive drama emerged to replace it; the fragmented fantasies had no ultimate goal to unify them; the appeals of each were severely limited; and the Disciples of Christ lost the sweeping persuasive effectiveness which had characterized their rhetoric for more than one hundred years.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

Since a religious/social movement never develops in a vacuum, one cannot fully understand a movement's rhetorical vision apart from the social-cultural circumstances which influence it. As one comes to understand the interplay of social-cultural setting and a movement's rhetoric, he can begin to account for the success or failure of the rhetoric. Moreover, if the rhetoric begins to lose its persuasive influence, one can examine shifts in the setting and/or in the rhetorical vision itself and look for discrepancies that have developed. He can then seek to bring the two back

into harmony. To be effective the rhetorical vision must offer at least a plausible interpretation of the data of the senses and account for developments in human activity and conditions so that target auditors find it personally satisfying. This is what the millennial vision of the Disciples of Christ did so adequately during the first generation and early second generation. This is what Disciples failed to do as they entered the twentieth century. This failure results either in the eventual death of the rhetorical vision or in a vision with a quite limited appeal.

A second observation is that the Disciples' rhetorical vision was vitally linked with some of the dominant American democratic political fantasies. History demonstrates that the form of the political government of a culture influences the form of church government. This can be seen in the history of the Church of England which came into existence under a monarchy and in the structure of the Roman Catholic Church, influenced by Constantine and his successors. Democratic church polity has been "a scarce commodity in historic Christianity."[69] It became a significant factor only after democracy was firmly established in the United States. The Disciples' vision was born and grew to strength and relevancy within a political democracy whose dramatizations the vision incorporated or paralleled. The rhetorical appeal of the Disciples' vision was directed to the American adventurer, idealist, and pragmatist, imbued with the spirit of democracy. The religious dramas challenged democratic Americans to build an ideal society through an ideal church and presented situations of religious egalitarianism, freedom of thought, and freedom from ecclesiastical authority. The vision offered a democratic religious situation in which protagonists could operate freely, fully, and rationally with God in their salvation as opposed to the aristocratic dramas of salvation in Calvinism

(spiritual aristocrats being those eternally predestined to salvation) and the emotionalistic fantasies of Arminianism. The Disciples' vision offered a church government of the people and by the people in keeping with the democratic rhetorical vision of a national government dramatized along similar lines. However, this original strength and source of persuasion apparently was a hindrance in cultures outside of America. Disciples have had modest representation in British Commonwealth countries, but "have never made significant advances outside of this favorable social and cultural atmosphere" of American political democracy.[70] Apparently, the democratic parallels of the vision cannot influence a significant number of people apart from a society with political rhetorics which dramatize a similar democratic scenario. Therefore, rhetorical visions probably will not be effective in cultures whose social, political, and religious structures are quite different from the visions' native cultures. If one hopes to influence people in these other cultures, he either must radically adapt his rhetorical vision or develop a new one parallel to the scenarios of the social-cultural setting of people he desires to influence.

A third observation concerns the drama of restoration. As a religious movement grows and solidifies its beliefs, it tends toward institutionalization. In so doing it may lose its original quality and impetus for existing. "The original, life-geared religion of the Founder which was designed to be a personal, practical, and health-giving nature becomes an involved system, confounded by disputing experts in the study of antiquities, housed in great establishments . . . with the worship of the humble soul declared invalid unless it pays tribute to a priesthood which has intervened itself between the disciple and his God."[71] This happened to the kingdom of God movement in America. What started as a dynamic effort ended

in a rigid structure. While the institutionalization attempted to consolidate and conserve the gains achieved in order to pass them on to the children and the children's children, it nevertheless resulted in a vital loss to the drama. The institution became much less dynamic in quality (even to the point of bordering on a static status), whereas the movement had maintained a strong dynamic quality which engendered ardent enthusiasm among adherents; the institution looked to the immediate past, whereas the movement had looked forward; the institution failed to keep pace with its changing culture; the institution began "to lack inner vitality; it [was] without spontaneity and the power to originate new ideas;"[72] it became content with past achievments as it codified its beliefs and feared loss more than hoping for new insights. Whereas the parent movement mounted a dynamic rhetorical offensive, the crystalized movement (now institution) fell into a static, defensive rhetorical vision. When the kingdom of God became an institution, the life-motivating "reign of Christ [became] a habit."[73] Life became law, and law became legalism. Legal tradition came between God and Disciples, faith in doctrine replaced faith in God, and Disciples moved from the concept of a chosen people with a special task to a community of chosen people especially favored for their own sakes. In such a situation restoration can never be a grand illusion, as liberal Disciples asserted. "Progress can sometimes be made by going backward--when that going backward is to guiding principles."[74] The rhetorical vision of a religious group can possibly replace the static nature of the group with a renewed dynamic quality when it directs people to restore "the faith of the Founder as well as the faith about him."[75] If a religious rhetoric is intended to point people to the same goals as those of the founder of the religion, it must also seek to guide them to restore the principles by which the founder

sought those goals. There continually remains the need for a rhetorical vision which "uncovers and cleanses the flowing spring of enduring religious faith."[76]

If the restorationists erred in the direction of crystalizing the Disciples' rhetorical vision, the liberals erred in insisting that the vision could be "directed along thoroughly philosophical and scientific lines."[77] A fourth conclusion is that the truths of religious faith are basically poetic and not scientific; they cannot be tested and proved by the scientific method. Moreover, religious truths belong more to the area of the imaginative than to the conceptual. Faith and imagination go together. Imagination is capable of grasping invisible, spiritual realities and making them visible. Religious faith implies a controlled imagination, molded and guided by ultimate reality, and expresses that reality by means of verbal pictures and symbols. Religious rhetoric ignores this at its own risk. Liberal rhetoric failed to achieve great persuasive success because it ignored this aspect in its rhetorical vision. It is at this point that fantasy drama is crucial to the persuasive effects of a religious rhetorical vision. Translating ultimate, invisible, spiritual truths into the fantasy world-view of its culture is an unending task for a religious rhetoric which hopes to persuade. As the cultural environment changes and new needs emerge, religious rhetoric must change "in favor of a successor better adapted to new desires and conditions."[78] Ultimate truths remain constant, but the rhetorical approach used to communicate the truths should change to fit the situation. Both liberal and conservative Disciples' rhetoric lost sight of this principle, became as much prosaic as dramatic, and hence lost must of the persuasiveness enjoyed in earlier days.

A final observation concerns the relationship between eschatology and religious rhetoric. The life and message of Jesus and the message of the New Testament as a whole are thoroughly eschatological. Eschatology is the context in which the gospel is firmly set and out of which the Christian rhetorician must speak. The Disciples' original rhetorical vision contained a firm, consistent eschatology. With its vision's culmination in the millennium and the millennium itself climaxed by Christ's personal appearance, resurrection, judgment, punishment, and reward, the rhetoric dealt with final matters in an imaginative, artistic manner. The fantasies of salvation and eternal destiny gave emotionally satisfying answers to peoples' questions regarding the ultimate matters of life. As long as the vision did this, it influenced its listeners. When the total vision fragmented, most of its eschatology faded out. Neither the liberal nor the conservative rhetorical vision sustained strong eschatological dramas. Without this emphasis the influence of Disciples' rhetoric weakened. Strong, consistent eschatological fantasies are essential to a religious rhetorical vision because eschatology helps modern man confront the problem, "How shall I evaluate my life and my struggles in this world?" (The choice is between optimism and pessimism, hope and hopelessness.) How one answers the question determines "the whole tone and tempo of life; for in the long run, we will live in accordance with our basic hopes or our fundamental despairs."[79]

Religious rhetoric must not neglect eschatology because eschatology helps modern man to set the trials, defeats, and triumphs of history (world history and his personal history) in proper perspective. Eschatological fantasies warn man against merely secular conceptions of history, civilization, and life and point out that hopes based on human power and

wisdom alone are self-defeating. They remind man that the present and future are determined by God, and this assurance can give him hope and confidence. The Bible sets the outcome of history, both general and personal, in the context of Christ's ultimate conquest in the final consummation.

> Whatever differences there may be between the world view of biblical times and ours, and whatever difficulties we may have in giving literal meaning to these concepts, they hold for us an understanding of what history is which is profoundly and eternally relevant to our actual experience. The New Testament sets God's creative act at the beginning of history, the cross in the midst of history, and God's judgment and mercy over all of history.[80]

The kingdom of God is a decisive reality, present in the world now and moving toward a more complete fulfillment in the future. In his kingdom God challenges man to acknowledge his reign and submit to it. In other words, eschatology confronts man with the ultimate realities of life and reminds him that God, not man himself, determines his ultimate destiny. Therefore, his present life must be determined by this ultimate destiny.

> Biblical eschatology meets modern men as it met men of old, with the declaration that in Jesus Christ they are confronted by wrath and grace, judgment and redemption, destruction and fulfillment. It therefore speaks of the world in which they live, the community in which they share, and the persons they are called to be . . . But always it speaks of God, of God's purpose and his power, and of his claim upon his creatures. And our response to that proclamation is nothing less than our choice between darkness and light, between death and life.[81]

A religious rhetoric which neglects the eschatological frame of reference is not true to the biblical message nor to the ultimate need of modern man. A religious rhetoric in which eschatological dramas are central will be much truer to the biblical message and will come much closer to offering man the proper understanding he needs to live his life in an everchanging, threatening world and to face the future with confidence.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The Disciples of Christ did not exist as a movement in 1800, yet by 1850 they numbered about 118,000 members and were the sixth largest Protestant body in America. William Warren Sweet, The American Churches: An Interpretation (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1948), p. 42. In the next twenty-five years Disciples more than tripled their membership, numbering about 400,000 in 1875 and increased to 1,120,000 by 1900. For statistics see Winfred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ: A History, rev. ed. (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1958), p. 359, and Lester G. McAllester and William E. Tucker, Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1975), p. 29. For a discussion of the Disciples' reaction to evangelical revivalistic emotionalism and its counter emphasis, see John L. Morrison, "A Rational Voice Crying in an Emotional Wilderness," West Virginia History, 34 (January 1973), 125-40.

[2]Raymond Bailey, "Building Men for Citizenship," in Preaching in American History, ed. DeWitte Holland (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 147.

[3]Ibid., p. 139.

[4]American millennial movements have usually been either premillennial or postmillennial. Premillennialism holds a pessimistic view of history in which the world progressively deteriorates morally and spiritually until Christ personally intervenes to establish a 1,000 year reign and subdue wickedness. Judgment, heaven, and hell follow the millennium.

Postmillennialism holds an optimistic view of history in which the world is converted to Christ through the work of his followers. World conversion is followed by a 1,000 year period of prosperity, progress, and universal righteousness during which Christ reigns spiritually through his church. Following this millennium Christ personally returns for judgment. This was the basis for the predominant millennial visions (both religious and secularized) in nineteenth century America.

[5]Virgin Land (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), p. 153.

[6]"The Agrarian Myth and the Disciples of Christ in the Nineteenth Century," Agricultural History, 61 (1967), 181.

[7]Alexander Campbell, "The Coming of the Lord--No. XXI," The Millennial Harbinger, N.S., 7 (1843), 74. The Millennial Harbinger was the premier journal among first generation Disciples. Campbell intended that it would "have for its object the development and institution of that political and religious order of society called THE MILLENNIUM, which shall be the consummation of that amelioration of society proposed in the Christian scripture." "Prospectus," The Christian Baptist 7 (1829-1830), 67.

[8]Alfred T. DeGroot, Disciple Thought: A History (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1965), p. 82.

[9]For descriptions of fantasy themes which accomplished this, see Carl Wayne Hensley, "Rhetorical Vision and the Persuasion of A Historical Movement: The Disciples of Christ in Nineteenth Century American Culture," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 61 (1975), 259-60.

[10]For a discussion of these characteristics of numerous Western Americans to which the Disciples' vision appealed, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953), pp. 350-60 and p. 369.

[11]Edwin Scott Gaustad, A Religious History of America (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1966), p. 227.

[12]Henry F. May, Protestant Churches and Industrial America (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1949), p. ix. For an anthology of rhetorical efforts dealing with this phase of American culture see Henry Nash Smith, ed., Popular Culture and Industrialism: 1865-1900, Anchor Books (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967).

[13]Charles Howard Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism: 1865-1915, Yale Studies in Religious Education, Vol. XIV (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), p. 11.

[14]May, Protestant Churches, p. ix. David W. Noble calls it "a profound cultural crisis," in The Progressive Mind, 1890-1917 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), p. 1.

[15]Ibid., p. 91.

[16]Ibid., pp. 110-11.

[17]Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel, p. 123.

[18]Ernest R. Sandeen, The Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism, 1800-1930 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. xvi.

[19]May, Protestant Churches, p. x.

[20]Garrison and DeGroot, Disciples of Christ, p. 393.

[21]Ibid., p. 411.

[22]Ibid., p. 361.

[23]H. Richard Niebuhr, The Social Sources of Denominationalism, Living Age Books (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), p. 183.

[24]Myron G. Phillips, "William Jennings Bryan," in History and Criticism of American Public Address, ed. by William N. Brigance (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960), II, 892.

[25]Ibid. In the Populist vision, as in the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian visions, the chosen people were typified as "the yeoman farmer, the most authentic American," and in the midwest and south the elect waged the "battle . . . against the forces of the factory, the city, and the corporation which threatened . . . these chosen people. . . ." Noble, Progressive Mind, p. 4. Noble points out that Populists perpetuated dramas of the millennial fantasies of chosen people and restoration of a pure paradigm of life and liberty.

[26]This has been called "the last mortal struggle between agrarianism and capitalism. . . ." Vernon L. Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1860-1920, III, p. 266, quoted in Phillips, "William Jennings Bryan," in History and Criticism, II, 893.

[27]John D. Hicks, The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1931), p. 406.

[28]"The Cross of Gold," in Classic Speeches: Words That Shook the World, ed. by Richard Crosscup (New York: Philosophical Library, 1965), p. 39. Noble says, "Bryan defined his role as a defender of rural innocence against the aggressive, rapacious finance capitalists of the urban East. His listeners knew that Bryan was attempting to defend sacred Americanism against profane un-Americanism, to defend productive yeoman against parasitical aliens." Progressive Mind, p. 13. To Bryan's constituents he was a modern Andrew Jackson striving to purge the American Eden and restore the sacred Republic of 1789.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid., p. 44.

[31]For a classic example of the religious prototype of Bryan's drama, see Cephas Shelburne, "Indiana and Our Plea," The Christian Standard, 40 (April 1904), 518.

[32]Hopkins, The Rise of the Social Gospel, pp. 14-15.

[33]Ibid., p. 16. For examples see D. R. Dungan, "Winning Souls," in The Iowa Pulpit of the Church of Christ: Its Aim and Work, ed. by J. H. Painter (St. Louis: John Burns Publishing Company, 1884), pp. 109-24; and Commodore W. Couble, "Man's Greatest Discovery," in The Indiana Pulpit, ed. by William Henry Book (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Co., 1912), pp. 237-46.

[34]The Kingdom of God in America, Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1959), p. 155.

[35]"The Agrarian Myth," p. 189.

[36]Ibid., p. 192.

[37]Benj. L. Smith, "The Twentieth Century's Administration of the Gospel Trust," in The Missouri Christian Lectures, Selected From the Courses of 1889, 1890, and 1891 (St. Louis: Christian Publishing Company, 1892), pp. 292-93.

[38]Dr. Dungan, "How Shall We Sustain the Gospel in the Cities?" in The Missouri Christian Lectures Delivered at Columbia, 1884, and Brownsville, 1885 (Chicago: Oracle Publishing Company, 1886), p. 107.

E. W. Darst, "City Evangelization," in Proceedings of the General Convention of the Christian Churches of the United States of America (1896), Microfilm copy, Disciples of Christ Historical Society, Nashville, Tennessee.

C. M. Sharpe, "Obedience to Missionary Vision," pp. 203-06; Austin Hunter, "Our Missionary Vision," pp. 206-09; Richard W. Abberley, "Obedience to the Missionary Vision," pp. 209-12; all are contained in Centennial Convention Report: One Hundreth Anniversary of the Disciples of Christ (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, n.d.).

[39]Harrell, "Agrarian Myth," p. 192.

[40]G. A. Hoffman, "Statistical Report," Proceedings of the General Convention (1906), p. 452.

[41]The two most influential journals for second generation Disciples were The Christian Standard, published in Cincinnati, and The Christian-Evangelist, published in St. Louis. Millennial rhetoric appears in them in abundance during the years under consideration.

[42]Henry F. May, The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), p. 9.

[43]Ibid., p. 7.

[44]Noble, Progressive Mind, p. 179.

[45]Ibid.

[46]Garrison and DeGroot, Disciples of Christ, p. 410.

[47][Edward Scribner Ames], "The Annual Meeting," Quarterly Bulletin of the Campbell Institute, 1 (April 1904), 3. This was the original journal of the Campbell Institute which later was published as The Scroll.

[48]Herbert L. Willett, Our Bible: Its Origin, Character, and Value (Chicago: The Christian Century Press, 1917). See various assertions stating this position on p. 119, pp. 177-78, p. 186.

[49][S. S. Lapin], "Bible Not Inspired," The Christian Standard, 50 (May 1915), 1118.

[50]C. C. Morrison, "Fundamentalism, Modernism and the Bible," The Christian Century, 41 (April 1924), 424.

[51]Willett, Our Bible, p. 177.

[52]Willett, "What Does God Do?" in The New Living Pulpit of the Christian Church, ed. by W. T. Moore, Jubilee Ed. (St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1918), p. 75.

[53]Ames, The New Orthodoxy (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1918), p. 55.

[54]Ralph G. Wilburn, "A Critique of the Restoration Principle: Its Place in Contemporary Life and Thought," Encounter, 20 (Summer 1959), 336. Wilburn's article obviously antedates the controversy but is cited as a clear, concise expression of the outcome of the liberal stance.

[55]Willett, Our Bible, p. 179.

[56]A. W. Fortune, "The Unwritten Creed of the Disciples," The Scroll, 4 (December 1906), 57.

[57]Wilburn, "Critique," p. 340.

[58]A. W. Fortune, "Returning to the Vision," The Christian-Evangelist, 75 (October 1937), 1364.

[59]Willett, Our Bible, p. 90.

[60]Willett wrote this series of articles under the general title, "The War, the Millennium and the Second Coming of Christ," The Christian Century, 35 (March-August, 1918). Each article appeared under an individual title.

[61]"Biblical Criticism: That Scandal in Chicago," The Christian Standard, 44 (August 1908), 1379.

[62]Ellis B. Harris, "The Road to Christian Union," The Christian-Evangelist, 64 (August 1927), 1049.

[63]Philip Y. Pendleton, "Is One Church as Good as Another?" The Restoration Herald, 6 (November 1927), 4.

[64]Ibid.

[65]James D. Murch, "Why Organize?" The Restoration Herald, 7 (January 1928), 2.

[66]Z. T. Sweeney, "The Sweeney-Willett Correspondence," The Christian Standard, 45 (September 1909), 1562.

[67]L. B. Jones, "The Consummation of Latitudinarianism," The Christian Standard, 45 (August 1909), 1460.

[68]"A Protest," The Scroll, 4 (November 1906), 3-4. M. P. Hayden "eloquently" referred to liberalism as "a gilded, perfumed, sugar-coated, 'made in Germany,' twentieth-century-branded, newly-painted-but-anticipated

counterfeit" of original Christianity. "Letters to the Brotherhood," The Restoration Herald 6 (February 1927), 30.

[69]DeGroot, Disciple Thought, p. 19.

[70]Ibid.

[71]Alfred T. DeGroot, The Restoration Principle (St. Louis: The Bethany Press, 1960), p. 19.

[72]Niebuhr, Kingdom of God, p. 168.

[73]Ibid., p. 171.

[74]DeGroot, Restoration Principle, p. 24.

[75]Ibid., p. 14.

[76]Ibid., p. 22.

[77]Ames, "The Annual Meeting," The Quarterly Bulletin of the Campbell Institute, 1 (April 1904), 3. Italics mine.

[78]Douglas Ehninger, "On Rhetoric and Rhetorics," Western Speech, 31 (Fall 1967), 247.

[79]DeGroot, Disciple Thought, p. 80.

[80]Daniel Day Williams, What Present-Day Theologians Are Thinking (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1952), p. 144.

[81]M. Jack Suggs, "Biblical Eschatology and the Message of the Church," Encounter, 24 (Summer 1963), 30.